

Yesterday's Mother to To-day's Daughter

By MRS. W. L. GEORGE.

THE daughter of to-day is enduring so much criticism that one wonders whether the mother of yesterday should remain uncriticized. It is an established fact that, throughout all ages, every generation has looked down on the one immediately preceding. But it is equally true that the passing generation feels no lesser contempt for the one it has produced. On both sides the criticism is likely to be unjustly bitter, particularly between mother and daughter. While it is true that the mothers are often unreasonable in their attitude toward their daughters, the daughters are, in many ways, very unjust toward their mothers.

This situation having arisen, it is interesting to discover how it has come about. The emancipation of woman has made such great strides during the last twenty years, particularly during the war, that the old fashioned mother faces an almost impossible task in adapting herself to the ways of life and thought of her daughter. Her own girlhood stands in the way of this readjustment. When one thinks of what was the girlhood of the woman who is now middle aged, one is amazed, not so much because she has evolved so little as because she has evolved so much.

The middle aged mother tolerates a number of things which her own mother would have received with a fit. For instance, smoking, which she herself indulged in on the sly thirty years ago; to-day she accepts a cigarette from her daughter's case. Chaparons are a thing of the past, possibly because she refuses to grow old, dances and plays games as energetically as her daughters. It is quite common now to allow daughters latch-keys, although some mothers still make difficulties. She allows her daughter to become daily more athletic, and even encourages her to ride astride clad in coat and breeches. Our grandmothers did not allow their daughters to issue invitations: Our mothers do. The daughter of to-day frequently arranges a tennis or luncheon party, and tells her mother later. Still, the old fashioned mother is not above criticism.

The Girl of Fifty Years Ago.

Before criticizing the mother of yesterday, who, according to her critics, has produced such a regrettable daughter, it is only fair to consider the difficulties of every imaginable description with which she was confronted. The girl of forty to fifty years ago lived a protected, sheltered life and entered into marriage in a state of comparative ignorance. Her education was of the scantiest; any individuality of character was quickly repressed; she was trained to believe that marriage was her sole aim in life. Is it then strange that she should view with dismay the freedom of thought and action enjoyed by the modern girl? Once married, she was plunged into the difficulties of rearing a large family without any of the advantages which modern science has produced. Properly trained nurses were unknown; instead of the efficient present day nurse all the help the mother could obtain was a woman untaught in feeding, doctoring and controlling; in those days the nurse's one recommendation was her complete devotion to the family. The young mother of to-day has countless sources of information, whereas the Victorian mother had only her own common sense to guide her.

The mother of yesterday was handicapped because her own mother had been able to do little for her, because the difficulties in educating young children were enormous; transport was inadequate; hygiene was almost unknown. Should we not be grateful to our mothers that they overcame these difficulties and broke down prejudice and tradition? After all, hampered as they were, they did bring us up, did make us fit to appreciate modern innovations. To-day the modern father takes it for granted that the child is of the first importance as regards housing, feeding and education. In the days of our grandmothers this was unheard of. Our mothers were hidden away in rooms devoted to them because these rooms were inconvenient for purposes of entertainment; in economical households the quality of their food was cut; their education was carried on by inefficient, uneducated governesses. The husband's whims were the first con-

sideration; in all matters his wish was law. It is to the credit of our mothers that they should have begun the fight against such odds; all honor is due to them for carrying it to such a successful climax. To the determined efforts of our mothers we owe part of (though not all) our capacity to rear our children under present day conditions.

To-day marriage is only one of many careers open to women. In our mother's girlhood it was, save under exceptional circumstances, the only one. In those days a girl who worked, except from necessity, was considered unladylike; if she persisted in following a career of her own she was looked upon as abnormal by her fellow creatures. It therefore follows that many

a career she is aware that she will enhance rather than endanger her chance of marriage.

Again, undue restriction of our mothers' education and career made them mentally uninteresting to the men they married; this was probably the cause of a great deal of domestic friction. Their chief training was in domesticity, and this was cultivated to such a pitch that in many cases it proved disastrous. Many homes have been ruined by the zealotry of the housewife. Wives spent their day harried by domestic details, with the result that when their husbands came home they had no conversation beyond the misdemeanors of the rest of the household. Husbands returning from the office, laden with worries,

presses itself to-day in municipal nurseries, clinics, &c.

Our mothers were totally incapable of impersonal criticism; they view with horror the present-day mothers, who calmly state that one of their children is selfish, another plain. They considered it one of the most important duties of the parent to refuse to admit a fault in their child, and they would listen to no criticism from friends or relations.

Affection and displeasure were much less restrained than they are to-day. Children were punished or their faults were condoned chiefly according to the mother's mood. Spoiling and punishment were much more pronounced and carried out with little or no justice. An example of this was given me by a man, the other day, who remembers a particular whipping he received from his mother when nine years of age because he innocently repeated at a luncheon party a remark his mother had made in his presence about a woman friend. This caused her considerable embarrassment, though the child was unaware of the crime he was committing. The whipping must have been unduly violent to be remembered after thirty years; the injustice of the punishment is obvious to the modern mother. The above illustrates how children were punished to afford a vent for the irritation of their parents, rather than to show them the wrong they had done. So much for punishment, but quite as many children were unduly spoiled as were unduly punished. Thus, a girl I know has surprised her parents considerably when, after a life of spoiling, her father ordered her to break off her engagement. She refused and ran away with the man. The parents cannot grasp that her excessively indulgent bringing-up gave her lessons in insubordination.

Parents, Children and "Scenes."

Another bad influence on children was the way in which parents unhesitatingly created a scene in the presence of their children and even demanded that the children should take sides. I remember a case of a child being awakened at night by an irate mother, to choose between living with her or with her father. The result was hysterical terror for the child, so the parents forgot their disagreement in their efforts to console their frightened offspring. To-day scenes of this description are avoided with the utmost care. Indeed, where incompatibility exists between the parents' temperaments the modern child for many years often hears nothing of it.

To-day children are carefully watched and developed on their own lines of individuality, but the mothers of yesterday tended to bring up their children according to their own desires and plans. No discrimination was employed as to their talents and temperament. Music and painting were forced upon them irrespective of inclination. Daughters were trained exclusively in accomplishments, not careers; a great deal of the friction of the last ten years has arisen through girls demanding to be trained in careers and refusing to be content with accomplishments.

Children were discussed much too openly in their presence and suffered greatly from the parents' pride in displaying their attainments. To-day we tend to play with our children more and to display them less. Visitors are generally taken to the nursery to watch the children at play; the unhappy victims are no longer marshaled to the drawing room to perform their parlor tricks; we exhibit them as they are, for better or worse.

Curiosity as to the facts of life was rigorously suppressed; the result upon the childish mind was to create morbid curiosity. To-day the modern parent does not seek to inform but treats such questions as sensible and in a matter of fact way.

Perhaps one of the most difficult things to cope with in the mother of yesterday was her demand for unquestioning obedience and affection. The daughter of to-day suffers continually from the parents' demand for the subordination of the will and the heart. Generally she is willing to give spontaneous affection, but at the same time she wishes to maintain her own individuality; thus, she comes into conflict with her parents because they demand



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women were leading lives for which they were totally unsuited—namely, married and maternal lives. They can hardly be blamed, therefore, if in this role they proved somewhat inefficient. To-day there is no such excuse; most careers being open to women, there is no reason for her to marry to insure a livelihood.

When Marriage Was the One Career.

The mother of yesterday was somewhat restricted in her choice of a husband. Naturally, marriage being the only career open to her, her parents were anxious to see her settled in life, and undue pressure was often brought to bear. Chaperonage, too, was strictly applied; therefore, girls had far less opportunity of judging what the man they were going to marry was really like. Being so strictly watched, only by sly maneuvers could they achieve knowledge of his temper, generosity, decency . . . and our nicest mothers were not sly. To-day, social relations between men and girls are so free and unhampered that we can hardly wonder that our mothers should lift their voices in protest. Rather should we marvel that they accept so much in silence.

What careers were open to the girls of our mothers' period, when they were driven by circumstance to earn their own living? With the exception of nursing, all professions were closed; employment in offices was almost unheard of; they could hope to become only governesses, companions, readers, aspire only to dependent positions. The daughter of to-day can choose practically any career she desires; her one difficulty is to overcome a rather tottering parental opposition. In choosing

did not care to be confronted with those of the household; inevitable collisions ensued. Neither of the parties was precisely to blame; what was at fault was this craze for domestic perfection. To-day the care of the house may be neglected, but, on the other hand, the husband is more likely to find on his return at night an interesting and cheerful wife, ready to enter into his affairs. From the point of view of house-keeping all the man desires is good food, decently served. On the whole he cares little whether the housemaid sweeps the carpets properly; he does not want to know that the cook is giving her mother half a pound of his butter every week.

How Mothers Loved and Love.

Here I realize that many will contradict me, but I do not hesitate to assert that the mother of yesterday did not love children in general as we love children to-day. Her own child she loved with the passion of possession, because it was hers, not because it was a lovable child. Woe betide the person who suggested that it was anything but perfect! Children with stepmothers were always looked upon with pity; it was thought that their stepmothers could not care for them with anything like the passion they felt for their own children. Stories of cruel stepmothers are to-day unusual, while in the past they were common. In one case I know of it was taken for granted that the stepdaughter should be left out when it was necessary for one child to stay at home. In other words, our mothers loved the child as part of their person; they felt no social responsibility for the welfare of all children; they had not the sense of community which ex-

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